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# Administration Attempting to Stem Information Flow to a Trickle

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The Reagan administration, in an effort to shut off leaks and ensure that the government speaks with one voice on national security matters, has adopted a press relations policy that appears to be considerably more restrictive than those of previous administrations.

The Central Intelligence Agency, which in recent years occasionally provided unclassified background briefings to reporters on request on a variety of subjects from oil to Afghanistan, has now ended that policy on orders from new Director William J. Casey.

The top-level National Security Council staff in the White House, including dozens of specialists who also frequently provided background in-

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formation on defense and foreign policy subjects in previous administrations, is now off-limits to reporters on orders of the president's national security adviser, Richard V. Allen.

At the departments of State and Defense, many career officials still welcome reporters to their offices on an informal basis. And there are still occasional background briefings to provide a fuller account of administration views on issues in which the officials doing the briefing cannot be identified by name.

But in those two agencies, other important information sources have gone dry. These are the daily public briefings by department spokesmen where reporters have one of the few chances to get the administration to explain policies on the record.

By the account of many experienced reporters, these regular briefings at both State and Defense are at their least productive point in many years

in the information they yield or the opportunities to extract more than what amounts to a daily government press release.

At the State Department, spokesman Dean Fischer, a former newsman, arrives for the briefing with a sheaf of papers, each day containing official department "guidance" that is prepared by senior specialists on a variety of subjects. When a question is asked for which he has guidance, he turns to that sheet in his folder and reads it. Nothing more is divulged.

One news agency reporter noted that during a regular 45-minute noon briefing at State recently, the spokesman responded more than 30 times with "don't know, can't say, no comment" or "I've got nothing for you on that."

Asked by The Post if the narrow scope of his guidance, which keeps him from being informative, bothers him, Fischer said: "The most difficult part of my job is to stand up there and say virtually nothing, particularly about the Middle East. But that's not a complaint about the guidance because I fully understand the reasons for it."

Those reasons, he says, are to avoid anything that could jeopardize U.S. diplomatic efforts.

At the Pentagon, spokesman Henry E. Catto Jr. was neither a newsman nor a defense specialist before taking over public affairs for an agency dealing with some of the most specialized issues in government. The tone for Pentagon information policy appeared to be set by Catto during his first

formal briefing May 19 when he told reporters there would no longer be any detailed accounting of U.S. and Soviet naval power in the Mediterranean, information that was routinely given out by previous administrations, even in a crisis.

A month earlier, Deputy Secretary of Defense Frank A. Carlucci put out a chilling memorandum to the Pentagon bureaucracy warning that unauthorized disclosure of classified information, whether inadvertent or intentional, would not be tolerated.

While that may seem normal, Carlucci also referred specifically to espionage laws and added that "even unclassified matters should be treated with circumspection when they relate to sensitive internal deliberations."

In circulating Carlucci's memo to his public information staff, Catto added a note that said aside from "posing a threat to national security, unauthorized disclosures tend to make our work more difficult by stimulating inquiries about the subject matters revealed. I am particularly concerned that there be no wounds of this type inflicted by members of this office."

The combination of these factors — the shut-off of access to CIA and NSC experts, the intimidating tone used toward the bureaucracy and the low information content of public briefings at State and Defense — may seem within the Reagan administration to have advantages in terms of controlling information flow.

It also may be convenient for an administration which has not formed policies on such key issues as relations with the Soviet Union and arms control or, for that matter, has not had a major public speech by the president describing his foreign policy.

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